

## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

### **AGREEMENT HELPS IMPROVE ABORIGINAL STUDENT SUCCESS**

HOWE SOUND – Members of the Howe Sound school district joined local Aboriginal leaders today to sign the district's first Aboriginal education enhancement agreement, West Vancouver-Garibaldi MLA Joan McIntyre announced.

"The Howe Sound school district has been working hard for the last number of years to improve achievement levels for its Aboriginal students," said McIntyre. "Today's agreement will continue to build on that hard work and will help Howe Sound Aboriginal students achieve their best. All the partners deserve congratulations for this historic agreement."

Local Aboriginal communities, the Ministry of Education and the school district worked closely to develop several strategies to help improve student achievement, including:

- Increasing Aboriginal student completion rates through a greater focus on trades and apprenticeship programs;
- Providing greater supports, such as Aboriginal mental health counselling, for students with behaviour and learning disabilities;
- Implementing proven strategies that will improve Aboriginal student attendance and re-entry into school; and
- Improving K-12 literacy rates through increased focus on early learning opportunities and strategies.

"This agreement is important because it helps ensure Aboriginal communities have a voice in the education of Aboriginal students," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "One of the Province's goals is to increase Aboriginal student success, and this agreement helps accomplish that by clearly setting out how the district and Aboriginal communities will work together to improve results for Aboriginal students."

There are 470 Aboriginal students in the Howe Sound school district this year – about 11 per cent of the district's total enrolment. The district serves the Squamish Nation, Lil'wat Nation, N'Quatqua Band, Xax'tsa, Samahquam Ucwalmicw, Skatin Nations, Metis, Inuit as well as all other First Nations communities, including off-reserve First Nations. The district lies in the traditional territories of the Squamish Nation, Lil'wat Nation and N'Quatqua Nation.

"This Enhancement Agreement has been driven by our community members involving our elders, youth, First Nations support workers and parents," said Squamish Nation councillor Dale Harry. "We are very excited about this partnership with the Province and the school district in Aboriginal education that allows for the participation, involvement, determination and commitment of Aboriginal communities."

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Thirty-five B.C. school districts have signed Aboriginal education enhancement agreements to date. These agreements support the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with First Nations, and to close gaps in education and economic opportunities.

School districts have seen encouraging results following the signing of an education enhancement agreement. In the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows district, Grade 7 Aboriginal reading and writing results on the Foundation Skills Assessment improved by 20 per cent. In the Cowichan Valley school district, Aboriginal school completion rates increased from 25 per cent in 2001 to 35 per cent in 2006.

The agreements are one component of the Province's strategy to improve Aboriginal student achievement. Others include the new First Nations education jurisdiction agreement and developing Aboriginal content for K-12 curriculum.

The Province is investing an estimated \$51.1 million a year – \$1,014 per student – for Aboriginal education in 2007-08. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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Media      Lara Perzoff  
contact:    Public Affairs Bureau  
              Ministry of Education  
              250 356-5963  
              250 920-9040 (cell)

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